

Introduction to Metaphysics

PHIL 215, Fall 2013

Instructor: Stephanie Leary

Spatiotemporal location: Ruth Adams Building, Room 208; Mon/Wed 3:55-5:15 pm

Course Description

This is an introductory-level survey-style course in analytic metaphysics. Metaphysics is a field of philosophical inquiry that engages with questions about the nature of reality: questions about what sorts of things exist and what they are like. For example, some questions that we'll focus on are:

- (i) What does it take for an object or person to remain *one and the same* over time and through change?
- (ii) What is change?
- (iii) What does free will require and do we have it?
- (iv) Do qualities like *redness* or *squareness* exist apart from the objects that have those qualities?
- (v) What is time like? Is there really a moving present moment, or is this an illusion?

Further topics that we may discuss, depending on time and class interest, are the metaphysics of gender and race, the metaphysics of art and fiction, or the metaphysics of the mind.

In this course, we will read and discuss some classic and contemporary (and sometimes very difficult!) philosophical texts regarding these topics, and you will be encouraged to share your own views, and present logical arguments for them, through written assignments and class discussion.

Course Goals

The primary goal of this course is to develop the sorts of thinking, writing, and verbal skills that are essential to doing philosophy. Doing metaphysics, in particular, requires doing some hard abstract thinking about the most basic, commonsense phenomena of our world and trying to really understand it and convey this understanding to others. So, the skills we will be honing in this course are: (i) the ability to read and understand difficult philosophical texts, (ii) critical thinking and problem solving, (iii) the ability to present arguments for philosophical views in a clear and logical way, and (iv) the ability to share your ideas in a clear and precise way both through written work and in conversation. The secondary goal of this course is to have *fun* while thinking about and discussing these really interesting (and puzzling!) topics!

Contacting Instructor

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Office hours: Tuesdays 11am-1pm (or by appointment)

Office: Gateway Transit Village, Room 541 (5th floor)

Requirements

(1) **Attendance and Participation (10% of final grade):** Philosophy is a social practice that requires asking questions and learning to discuss ideas with others, so come to class prepared to do just that! (This means you need to come to *every* session having done the reading in advance.) You will earn participation points by asking questions during lecture, participating in class discussions and group activities, and doing occasional in-class writing.

(2) **Two Papers (each 25% of final grade):** There will be two 5-6 (double-spaced) page papers due throughout the semester. For each paper, there will be a selection of topics to choose from, but you may also create your own paper topic, *so long as you run it by me first at least one week before the due date.*

(3) **Short writing assignment(s) (10% of final grade):** there will be one or two short (1-2 pages) writing assignments before the first paper, which will help prepare you for the two papers.

(4) **Final Exam (30% of final grade):** This will be a comprehensive exam that will cover all the material covered throughout the course. A review sheet will be made available, and we will use our last day of class to review for the final.

Sakai

There is a Sakai site for this course, and you need to use it! All the readings for this course will be made available on Sakai under the Resources tab. (There is no textbook for this course!) I will also use Sakai to post assignments, make announcements, and handle the grades. You will also submit all of your assignments through Sakai with the “Assignments 2” tool. So, you need to make sure that you can access the site and that Sakai has the relevant email address that you use, so that you get all the email alerts when things have been posted.

Plagiarism

I take academic integrity very seriously. Every assignment you submit through Sakai will be automatically run through the plagiarism detection software provided by Turnitin.com. All work you submit for this course must be your own. So, every direct quote you use needs to be marked as a quote and references need to be provided. Even if you paraphrase text from an article or website, or simply use ideas that you found therein as inspiration for your paper, you need to provide a citation that credits the idea to its author.

Absence Policy

Students may miss *two* classes without being penalized with respect to their grade for attendance and participation. Students who miss more than two classes will be penalized, unless they have a *very serious excuse* (like a medical or family emergency). If you have such an excuse, you need to go through official channels: contact a Dean of Students, whom you can give the appropriate documentation for your excuse (e.g. doctor’s note, photo of detached limb, etc.), and they will

email me the necessary paperwork for excusing your absence. It is *your responsibility* to catch up on the material that you missed.

Late-Work Policy

Late work will not be accepted.

Meta-policy

I reserve the right to amend the course schedule and policies as the semester progresses. I will only do so fairly, for very good reasons, and with plenty of warning.

Provisional Topics & Readings

(Readings for each day will be announced in class and on the home page of our Sakai site as we progress through the course.)

Identity, change and persistence

- (1) E.J. Lowe's "Chapter 2: Identity over time and change of composition" (from *Survey of Metaphysics*)
- (2) Theodore Sider's "Personal Identity" Chapter from *Riddles of Existence*
- (3) Derek Parfit's "Personal Identity" from *Reasons and Persons*
- (4) Tamar Gendler's "Personal Identity and Thought Experiments"
- (5) Excerpt from David Lewis's *On the Plurality of Worlds*
- (6) Sally Haslanger's "Endurance and Temporary Intrinsic"

Constitution

- (7) Theodore Sider's "Constitution" from *Riddles of Existence*
- (8) Karen Bennett's "Spatio-temporal Coincidence and the Grounding Problem"

Nature of time & the possibility of time travel

- (9) E.J. Lowe's "Chapter 17: Tense and the Reality of Time"
- (10) Dean Zimmerman's "The Privileged Present: Defending an A-theory of Time"
- (11) Laurie Paul "Temporal Experience"
- (12) David Lewis's "Paradoxes of Time Travel"

Free Will

- (13) Peter Van Inwagen "The Incompatibility of Free Will and Determinism"
- (14) David Lewis's "Are we Free to Break the Law?"
- (15) Roderick Chisholm "Human Freedom and the Self"

Particulars and Universals

- (16) Selections from Plato's *Parmenides* and *Republic*
- (17) E.J. Lowe's "Realism versus Nominalism" from *Survey of Metaphysics*
- (18) Armstrong's "Universals as Attributes" an Excerpt from *Universals: an Opinionated Introduction*

Further topics and readings will be determined later on in the course.



¹ Image from the Hyperbole and a Half blog post, "This is why I'll never be an adult": <http://hyperboleandahalf.blogspot.com/2010/06/this-is-why-ill-never-be-adult.html>.